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EDITOR: JOHN GARRETT · 17 ROUTE DE MALAGNOU · GENEVA · SWITZERLAND
TEL. 36 71 30 · CABLES OIKOUMENE U.S. ENQUIRIES: WCC, 156 FIFTH AVE. NEW YORK 10 : TEL. WATKINS 4-8551

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Rapid Social Change Consultations Held in Africa, Asia

(Geneva) - Three consultations on the Christian responsibility toward areas of rapid social change have been held in the last month, two in Africa and one in West Pakistan. Sponsored by the World Council of Churches and local Christian councils, the consultations considered studies of social change under way in Africa and Asia.

Fifty persons from both European and African churches attended the five-day consultation in late November in the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia and considered three major problems of rapid social change there: family life, economic life and the life of the nation. Working groups on the topics prepared statements which will be published and presented to the churches for study and discussion.

Dr. C.L. Van Doorn, Dutch missionary sociologist, told the conference that there was a need for the churches "to engage in the struggle for righteousness and a willingness to sacrifice non-essential elements in one's own culture in order to help the coming into being of a multi-racial society". Dr. Van Doorn has been working as a consultant with the Christian Council of Northern Rhodesia during the past nine months on an ecumenical study project on the Christian responsibility in working for a multi-racial community.

Others attending included Mr. Garfield Todd, former missionary from New Zealand and until recently prime minister of Southern Rhodesia; Mr. Maurice Webb, a businessman of Durban, South Africa, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, and Mr. Philip Potter, executive

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secretary of the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches.

The conference marked the first step in the launching of the new ecumenical lay training centre which is being developed in the Mindolo Mission near Kitwe, Northern Rhodesia.

Kenya Consultation Reviews Study

Kenya Christian leaders met at the Bible House in Nairobi on December 1 - 4 to make a preliminary review of the results of a survey and study project begun two years ago by the Christian Council of Kenya.

Among those reporting to the conference was Mrs. Marion Forrester, an economist and social worker from the United States, who has been studying economic and social problems of urban families in Nairobi. She told the conference that her work had raised the question of whether the present pattern of economic development was helping the African or serving mainly to disorient and uproot him. "On the one hand, the indigenous people who participate in the new system have their activities curbed by racial stratification in this predominantly African society. Yet they have their wants constantly intensified by luxury consumer imports, which are out of their reach. On the other hand they cannot return to their traditional way of life.... Caught in this web, has the African the enterprise, the opportunity and the will to develop, or has Westernisation evolved an urban proletariat which by definition means that he has no will, no enterprise and no opportunity to develop?"

A second and larger conference on rapid social change will be held in Kenya in June 1959.

Seminar Held in West Pakistan

The Christian Council of West Pakistan and the World Council sponsored a seminar on the rapid social change in West Pakistan on December 12 - 14 at Forman Christian College in Lahore.

The conference was organized by Mr. N.S. Massey who opened the meeting by telling the 25 participants of the important task confronting the churches in West Pakistan because of the rapid social changes taking place. The purpose of the meeting was to outline a long-range programme of study and action. Among the speakers was the Rev. Hans-Ruedi Weber, executive secretary of the WCC's Department on the Laity.

EPS, Geneva

NCC in US Discusses Role of Missions

(Pittsburgh) - "Mission boards must be closely related to the whole Church, be a channel between churches and have more technical competence if they are to meet the challenge of a 'ferment' world," Dr. Luther A. Gotwald said at the ninth annual assembly of the Division of Foreign Missions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. He is executive secretary of the division.

The new type mission board today, he said, must enlarge its scope and possibly change its name.

Mission leaders were also urged to recognize that each board is engaged in its share of the world-wide mission and not in establishing a monopoly of what it considers "the best church". Dr. John Coventry Smith of the United Presbyterian

Church, USA, said that the "work of the whole Church belongs to all of us. If Baptists and Methodists are strong in Burma, there is no reason why a Presbyterian should be unhappy until he has established Presbyterian work in that country."

At the same time, he said that mission agencies in the United States should not stand in the way of church unions when they are sincerely desired. "Let us give the churches which we have participated in establishing across the world the same freedom under God to express their Christian faith that we have enjoyed in our own history."

The 350 assembly delegates invited denominations not affiliated with the division to consult with it on common missionary problems. All Christian missionary bodies were assured "that we are prepared to discuss ways by which channels of communication, fellowship, common study and consultation can be opened".

In urging consultation with unaffiliated groups, the division said it deplored "the separation which exists between its member agencies and other missionary bodies". In expressing a "feeling of oneness" with all other evangelical Christians engaged in the missionary task, the division said it regarded every instance of disunity "with all seriousness and deep penitence". EPS, Geneva

Alexandria's Greek Patriarch Honoured

(Alexandria) - Special honours were paid to the Patriarch of Alexandria, His Beatitude Christopher II, on Sunday, November 30, when he celebrated his fiftieth year of service as a bishop within the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria.

The Patriarch, who assumed his present office in 1939, was fêted by the Greek Orthodox clergy and people of Egypt.

The Patriarchate's Holy Synod in late November named five new bishops - all now archimandrites, - Parthenios Koinidis as Metropolitan of Carthage, Synesios Laskarides as Metropolitan of the Soudan, Cyprian Papadopoulos as Metropolitan of Central Africa, Nicholas Varelopoulos as Metropolitan of East Africa and Barnabas Fotaras as Bishop of Mareotis. EPS, Geneva

Hierarchy of Church of Greece to Re-convene

(Athens) - Reports from Greece say that the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece has decided to call the Church's hierarchy together again on January 21, 1959.

This further meeting, following so soon after the hierarchy's month-long deliberations in November, is unprecedented. Some years usually elapse between meetings of the bishops.

Widespread criticism of the message issued by the bishops at the close of their November meeting (see EPS No. 46) has been voiced in some sections of the Greek press and by individuals. EPS, Geneva

Cape Town Anglicans Resist Apartheid

(Cape Town) - The Cape Town diocesan synod of the Anglican Church in South Africa has passed a strongly-worded resolution aligning itself against the South African government's policy of apartheid.

The resolution cited a statement adopted by ten churches from three continents at the Reformed Ecumenical Synod's meeting in Potchefstroom, in the Union of South Africa, last August. The Reformed Synod was attended by delegates from two Gereformeerde-type Afrikaans-speaking South African churches.

"This synod", said the Anglican resolution, "in reaffirming the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man in a common redemption, views with concern and dismay the developing racial policy of the government and joins with the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, which met recently at Potchefstroom, West Transvaal, in asserting that no race may deem itself entitled to a privileged position and consider itself superior to other races and that all believers are brethren in Jesus Christ".

EPS, Geneva

Church of Central Africa to Be Autonomous

(Blantyre, Nyasaland) - The Church of Central Africa, founded by the Church of Scotland Mission, is being turned over to African control and will become completely independent.

The Rev. A.M. Rennie, Church of Scotland representative, said that "we are now at the stage of integrating the mission and the church. The Africans must be given an opportunity to form a strong church and not to lean on us." He added, however, that the white congregations of the Church of Scotland in Zomba and Blantyre will not merge with the Church of Central Africa. "Too many whites are against this," he said.

EPS, Geneva

Youth Dedication Conflict in Eastern Germany

(Berlin) - The problem of the government-sponsored youth dedication services and their conflict with confirmation is again in the news from the German Democratic Republic.

The conference of member churches of the German Evangelical Church in Eastern Germany has urged all its members to stop excluding from confirmation classes young people who are preparing for the youth dedication. It asks the churches to exercise "merciful spiritual care" for these young people and proposes that those who have taken part in the dedication service be given a chance to be confirmed after a year, if they participate regularly in church life.

In quoting statistics about the participation in last year's confirmation services, Bishop Otto Dibelius cited a town of 20,000 near Berlin where out of 200 children leaving school, only three had been confirmed. The parents of the others, he said had not had the courage nor the strength to resist the pressure put upon them to send their children to the youth dedication.

However, some East German churches which this year for the first time are allowing boys and girls to attend confirmation classes while preparing for the youth dedication, report that more children are taking part in confirmation preparation than last year. The increase is attributed to the new regulations. (See EPS Nos. 38 and 44) It is estimated that 60 per cent of the children taking part in the youth dedication will also attend confirmation classes.

EPS, Geneva

European Churches to Confer in Denmark

(Geneva) - For the first time on record representatives of Europe's non-Roman Catholic churches will hold a regional conference to face up to their common tasks and problems.

The Church Conference, planned as the first in a possible series of such occasional meetings, will be held at Nyborg, Denmark, from January 6 - 9.

The main subject set down for discussion by about eighty church leaders expected to attend from some eighteen countries on both sides of the iron curtain is "European Christendom in Today's Secularised World". Sub-themes to be treated are: The Encounter of the Christian Faith and Modern Technics in Europe, The End of the Constantinian Era in Europe?, The Past and Present Contribution of Eastern Orthodoxy to European Civilisation and What Have the European Churches in Common in Their Heritage and Present Responsibility?

Speakers on the four sub-themes, in the order listed, will be Canon Edward Wickham, industrial chaplain in the Diocese of Sheffield, England; Professor Pierre Burgelin of Paris; the Metropolitan James of Melita, representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva; and, for the last subject, Professor J.B. Soucek of Prague and Professor Nils H. Sjøe of Copenhagen.

The conference has been planned as the result of a series of informal meetings held in different countries, including one in Denmark last August at the time of the World Council of Churches' Central Committee meeting, also at Nyborg. At the forthcoming Nyborg conference the European churches will decide what form an on-going cooperation will take. Bishop Hanns Lilje, Lutheran, of Hanover, Germany, has acted with Archbishop Kiivit of Tallinn, Estonia, USSR, Dr. Egbert Emmen, general secretary of the Netherlands Reformed Church, and Dr. Hans-Heinrich Harms, Geneva, to organise the January Nyborg conference.

The World Council of Churches has been kept informed about plans for the European regional meeting through its two European presidents, Dr. John Baillie of Edinburgh and Bishop Otto Dibelius of Berlin. Bishop Dibelius will attend the Nyborg conference, together with Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, WCC general secretary. However, a spokesman for the conference's organising committee emphasized that the European Church Conference is not a result of WCC planning, but has been summoned on the initiative and responsibility of the churches themselves.

Among countries with churches sending participants are Denmark, Czechoslovakia, USSR, Poland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Yugoslavia, Finland, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Spain, France, Hungary, Norway and Belgium.
EPS, Geneva

In Brief

The Prague Christian Peace Conference has issued a call to "leaders of Christian churches in the whole world" to observe the anniversary of the atomic raid on Hiroshima as a day of repentance. The call was drafted by the conference's continuation committee at a meeting in Debreczen, Hungary.

RAVEMCCO (Radio, Visual Education and Mass Communication Committee), a unit of the Division of Foreign Missions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, has marked its tenth anniversary with a public meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The agency now operates radio stations in Japan, Korea, the Philippines, the Near East and Latin America, conducts training programmes in mass communications techniques and maintains mobile units to carry films and literature to outlying districts in Asia and Africa.

* *

Plans for a national lay school of theology, reported to be the first of its kind in the United States, have been announced by the two laymen's organisations of the United Church of Christ. The first week-long course will be held in June at the denomination's Lancaster Theological Seminary, giving intensive training in theology, Bible and practical churchmanship for lay men and women.

* *

The Communist press in East Berlin is making new attacks on Bishop Otto Dibelius after a sermon he preached in the Marienkirche in East Berlin on December 7. He is criticised for expressing his disapproval of the Soviet note on the Berlin question and accused of misusing the pulpit for "propaganda in favour of Adenauer".

* *

British immigration authorities have assured the Church of Scotland that there will be no difficulty in customs formalities when Dr. Martin Niemöller of Germany visits Glasgow in early January. The last time Dr. Niemöller was scheduled to visit the United Kingdom (see EPS No. 40) he left London Airport and returned directly to Germany as a protest against the treatment he received from customs officials.

* *

The International League to Oppose Racial Prejudice and Anti-Semitism has awarded its annual prize to Father Trevor Huddleston for his book, "Who Is My Neighbour?". Father Huddleston, a well-known Anglican priest, worked for many years near Johannesburg and has been one of the leading critics of the apartheid policy of the Union of South Africa.

* *

The Evangelical Church in Austria is appealing for a speedy settlement of "the injustice done to the church" under the Nazi regime which abolished state contributions to the church. In a debate in the Austrian National Council on the nation's budget, Dr. Geissler, a Protestant deputy, pointed out that the delay in arriving at a legal settlement of the question has serious consequences for Protestants. He said that the church is only able to pay its pastors 70 per cent of their salaries and feared the amount might be even lower next year.

EPS, Geneva

The next issue of EPS will appear on January 9, 1959.

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